



GRINDING DOWN THEIR SYSTEM ONE CURB AT A TIME

I initially knew Max Ward as the drummer from SPAZZ (R.I.P.); I was a huge fan of the band. Known as "Hirax Max" to some, he has played in millions of bands from PLUTOCRACY to SPAZZ to CAPITALIST CASUALTIES to WHAT HAPPENS NEXT to SCHOLASTIC DETH. He has written extensively about hardcore from a demo perspective doing a zine called *Mosh of Ass*, writing for *Short, Fast, and Loud* and doing a column for *Maximum Rockroll*. Max started the label, 625 Productions, in '93, originally focusing on the West Bay cartel of thrash core bands from that period. He is approaching his hundredth release with no signs of slowing down, having released and co-released some great things like the *Possessed to Skate* comp, the *Bandanna Thrash* series, the SPAZZ/CHARLES BRONSON split, the *Bandanna Thrash* flexi, the KURBITS I.R. EP, the SKEEZIKS discography, and the GORDON SOLIE 10". He has helped the North American hear about great bands like the JELLYROLL ROCKHEADS, DISCARGA, D.R.Y., YOUTH ENRAGE, POINT OF FEW, DUMBSTRUCK, CORNERED, and QUATTRO STAGIONE. He has released great bands from here like CHARLES BRONSON, CRUCIAL ATTACK, R.A.M.B.O., PLUTOCRACY, and SOCIETY OF FRIENDS. And he has worked hard at unearthing some greats like HHH, PROTES BENGT, the SKEEZIKS, and the soon-to-be-released RAPED TEENAGERS collection. We have become good friends from being pen pals over the years, sharing a fondness for demos and current Japanese hardcore. I was flattered when the idea came up that I should do a label profile on 625 Productions, because it is my favorite record label. I was also taken aback, as I figured so many other folks would know him better who might be from the Bay Area. But we started with a few emails, swapping incites about the philosophy of what I think will be one of the most influential labels of our time. Interview by *Stephe Perry*

MRR: How did you get the name Hirax Max?

Hirax Max: That was just SPAZZ goofing around, making fun of punk names and such. I was sitting there with Dan and I was saying, "Man, I'm screwed with the name Max. I can't have some cool punk name." So we started coming up with really stupid names and since we were always joking around about the band HIRAX, that came up. It's kinda a wart on my identity now. I'll travel and I'll meet someone at a show and go, "Hey, my name is Max, what's yours?" and sometimes I'll get "Oh I know, *the* Hirax Max."

MRR: Your label seems to have some crossover into metal. What is your history with metal? What were you into first, metal or hardcore?

Hirax Max: Good question, really; and the more I think about it, the more I realize that I got into both at the same time. My sister had a huge influence on me. Not so much that I looked up to her more than in any other brother/sister relationship, but because she was involved in the local punk scene around '81 and '82, so we had a ton of bands and people over to our house when I was young. I heard a lot of stuff being played, and she took me to some shows where I was exposed to some bands. This was when I was in fourth grade, around '83, when I was 10. It was like there was this sound that I heard every now and then that perked my ears. I couldn't describe it, and I didn't know what it was, but I knew it when I heard it. So I started to look for it on my own. I bought Ozzy Records at Gemco (now known as Target) and other things, and I just never found that sound. It wasn't until I got the Bones Brigade video show with the FAC-TION song in the intro that I heard that sound I was looking for, and that same year my sister kicked me down a tape of a local metal band she was checking out, which turned out to be METALLICA's first record. Both those things had the sound that I had heard in my sister's room, or at the shows she took me too. And once I started buying records like DISCHARGE, D.R.I., and SUICIDAL TENDENCIES, or early SLAYER records, I started to realize there were all these different ways to make that sound.

MRR: So was it your sister that got you into hardcore?

Hirax Max: Yeah, it was my sister. She was going to shows at this place called the Varsity Theater in Palo Alto, in the suburbs of San Francisco. So every time there was a tour going through the Farm or the Vats or On Broadway or Ruthies, the bands would play there too. There was this amazing scene, hundreds of kids would come from all over, and bands like PLH, WHIPPING BOY, RIBZY, GRIM REALITY, SOCIAL UNREST, MISTAKEN IDENTITY, ARMISTICE, EXECUTIONER, and HALF CHURCH would open the shows. So my sister knew these bands and we would have people over to the house all the time. I got to be accepted by these older kids—my sister was seven years older than me—and pretty soon, my sister was sneaking me out to shows. She wanted to show me off to her friends like, "Here's my dorky little brother." But that really fucked me up for life cuz from then on, I was hooked. She got out of it around '83-'84, got really into the LA death rock stuff, but she still hung out with punks. But she kicked me all her records. So I got the

7 SECONDS EP along with the CRUCIFIX LP—she was friends with Sothira—and all this other shit. Some of it took awhile to get used to—the singing, the poor recording quality—but that laid the seeds. So when I was at my most curious, there was a great scene in my area with radio shows and local bands that helped me explore what was going on.

MRR: How many bands have you been in? Did being in bands make you start a label? If not, what were your reasons behind putting out records?

Hirax Max: How many bands...that's a damn good one. I screwed around when I was young with a band called DEMENTED, later named PROCRASTINATION, but that doesn't count. Then I did a band called BACKSLIDE in '87 or '88 which was influenced by the UK scene—it was metallic and fast with low vocals—shit like CONCRETE SOX and DEVIATED INSTINCT, but we were pretty bad. We recorded a few rehearsals, played a few shows, and that was it.

I joined PLUTOCRACY right after that, I guess in '89, and played with PLUTO for three years. That was the first band I did that played around and released some stuff. After that I did SPAZZ, which was originally called GASH. It was going to be a two man project band with Dan, but it slowly evolved into a real band. While I was in SPAZZ I did a few bands; I sang horribly for EVOLVED TO OBLITERATION, and participated in other side projects like BOMBS OF DEATH with Steve from ASSUCK and FULL FLEDGE, a joke sXe band with the BRONSON kids. CAPITALIST asked me to join after Matt left, that was '95 or '96. Then WHN started, and I joined SCHOLASTIC DETH in '99. Then PLUTOCRACY reformed in '97 or '98. Shit, what else—I know I'm missing something. Right now I'm doing SCHOLASTIC DETH, CAPITALIST CASUALTIES, WHN?, and a few new bands: I SHIT YOU NOT which is fast core with people from VULGAR PIGEONS; FxUxN, with WHN, LIFE'S HALT and NERD ALERT members; and STOCKHOLM SYNDROME. Shit, what does that make it, twelve or something?

As for the label, I started it to release records from all these awesome local bands that weren't getting the recognition they deserved. Bands like NO LESS, GODSTOMPER, ETO, and AGENTS OF SATAN. These were the bands that SPAZZ was playing with at the time. We all started at the same time, so it was a small but growing scene. I thought if I could do some small-press EP's of these bands that maybe some real label would be interested in doing something more with them. I wanted to keep 625 a label that was mainly focused on releasing records from new local bands, but it turned into something which I wanted to use to release records from international bands that deserved to be heard as well. I bought demos constantly, and wrote to a lot of people, so I had all these tapes from unknown bands from across the globe that I started thinking about releasing.

By being in bands, I got to meet a lot of awesome people on tour, so that is one thing that has directly influenced the label. We had two-month-old Japanese bands open our shows and blow us out of the water; it made me think, "Dude, these guys need to be heard." Now after coming back from Brazil, I have a few ideas up my sleeve for releasing new and unknown bands from down there as well. There is just so much out there that is new and sincere and I want to help 'em out...either get them in contact with a better label or help them get a record out so people can hear 'em. It has a lot to do with the people in the band, people who are down to earth and sincere. By touring and meeting these people face to face and being able to get to know them, I want to support them even more. I don't want to release a record by a band that is great musically and lyrically but is comprised of a bunch of assholes.

MRR: What were some of these Japanese bands that made an impression?

Hirax Max: To begin with, musically, RAZOR'S

EDGE blew me away. CAPITALIST CASUALTIES played with them right after their EP came out, and I was floored. They ended up using pictures from that show for their CD, and lo' and behold there's the dumb gaijin—me—on the back of it. I started talking to Kenji after we met at that show, and that's how I got turned onto the JELLYROLL ROCKHEADS demo right when it came out. I have been talking to Kenji for so long about doing some RAZOR'S EDGE records, which might happen this year.

I meet a lot of people too. You know, kids will come up and go, "Here's my band's demo." And on my flight home I pop it in my Walkman and get blown away. I write them when I get back and ask if they want to do something. Or sometimes I will just sit and talk with people and we build a really strong friendship, like the LIE or the CRUCIAL SECTION dudes. Just hanging out with them made me want to support them more. There's an unusual hierarchy in Japan, where new, young bands are made to feel intimidated and out of step with the older and more established bands. So I'm really down with trying to support a band that is just starting and doesn't have scene cred there.

Most of the bands that US and European kids go gaga over from Japan are not liked in Japan by too many people, or they are frowned upon by the older, more established punk bands.

MRR: I was turned onto the recent scene in Japan based through 625 releases. I first heard the terms "bandanna thrash" and "fast core" thanks to the flexi and some of your earlier releases like the D.R.Y. EP, the L.I.E. EP, and the CRUCIAL SECTION LP. I later came across a RAZOR'S EDGE release that referred to Japanese fast core as "blitzkrieg thrash". It's a genre in it's infancy working out it's identity. Did terms like "bandanna thrash" and "fast core" come from the Japanese? You have recanted the term "bandanna thrash". What was the problem with that term?

Hirax Max: I'm glad someone bought those releases. And yeah, that RAZOR'S EDGE CD is probably one of the best records I have heard in the past five years. I was going to do a US version on vinyl but it didn't work out.

As for the identity, I would disagree that it's in its infancy. I hear a lot about a "revival" of sorts, but I don't agree with that really. I don't see it as a return or whatnot, because you had bands all through the mid-90s playing really fast, high energy HC as well, but that was termed power-violence. In five years, there will be some new term for the music when a band is influenced by INFEST or HERESY or SOA for that matter. I find that it happens more in waves, and, for some reason, we just went through this really popular wave when all these kids, from emo kids to post-youth crew kids, were into buying GAUZE records. The same bands they hated three or four years earlier suddenly became cool to listen to. But the core of the music has always been there, I think. You can draw a line from records released by early labels like SST to ADK to MCR to In Your Face to Off the Disc to Slap a Ham to DeadAlive and its one straight line with no breaks.

As for the terminology, oh man. Yeah, that term "bandanna thrash" was just something that we, WHN, or I, with the release of the comp flexi, came up with on a whim, not even thinking. It was a joke, but it did refer to a style of dress that the bands we were influenced from wore. Bands like NEGAZIONE, LARM, HEIBEL, and SKEEZIKS, copied the SUICIDAL look, but played really fast, DIY, political crossover; and that's who we were influenced by.

Japanese bands like FLASH GORDON and CRUCIAL SECTION had been playing that style for years, a lot better than WHN, but that term "bandanna thrash" hadn't been coined. It was all about an 80s style. But once that flexi comp came out, that became the term, and WHN got hyped

around that time. People started calling their bands "bandanna thrash", and people wrote columns about the history of it, and what not. It never even existed. It was a light-hearted joke, but the term stuck.

MRR: You've recently released some things by DISCARGA from Brazil. Who are some of the bands that you are looking at working with since your trip to South America?

Hirax Max: I've been talking to the I SHOT CYRUS guys for a year or two, and after their tracks on the amazing Thrashmaster comp LP that came out last year I asked them if they wanted to do something. I think we are planning on releasing some already recorded tracks, and then doing a US version of their upcoming LP. I want to do a Brazilian EP comp cuz there are so many good new bands, like MIERDA, MAYOMBE, JAZZUS, KONTRATTAQUE, and many others. I think I'm going to do a split EP with DISCARGA down the road—they are, by far, one of my favorite bands—and hopefully I'll work with INFECT and a few others. I totally respect labels like Sin Fronteras out of Minneapolis who are putting out some great punk records from Latin America.

I'm also trying to figure out how to get MUKEKA DI RATO and DISCARGA up to tour the states. The problem lies with getting visas. For some reason, to get Brazilians visas to the states is like squeezing water from a rock. Bands get denied all the time, and people who just want to be tourists get denied. It's totally fucked, I think, but me and Ken Sound Pollution are going to try some things. If the kids here saw DISCARGA they would shit their pants.

MRR: What was the first record 625 Productions released and why did you put it out?

Hirax Max: The first release was the NO LESS/ETO split EP. I had put out some records before that, mainly out of necessity, since no one in '90 in the Bay Area was going to put out PLUTOCRACY records. But once I decided that I wanted to release other bands from this area that I thought deserved to be heard, I decided, well shit, I should start a label; thus 625 was born. The first ten records or so were releases from local bands from that time period, bands where I hoped that once a real label heard 'em, that they would get more records out and be able to tour, which happened. After that, I expanded my horizons to the international scene, but I wanted to keep it to working with either new bands, or bands that other labels weren't releasing. That's been my guiding light till today, although I have strayed from that every now and then.

MRR: Out of all the releases that you have done, what is your most memorable and why? What are you most proud of releasing? What is your most favorite release and why?

Hirax Max: I don't know really. There are a few different releases that stick out for different reasons. The CORNERED releases stick out since everyone always asks me, "Why did you put those out?" But I thought they played an awesome brand of NY-style HC mixed with blast beats. Better than all the Victory shit that was coming out. Plus, they were in high school and were super-sincere motivated kids. The DISCARGA EP happened in a funny way. Daniel wrote to me to tell me that Douglas, the original bassist, loves WHN and had gotten a WHN tattoo. In the package was their demo. When I put it on, I wrote 'em back saying forget WHN, DISCARGA is the best thing I have heard in years. That demo floored me so hard.

L.I.E.'s first EP is still one of my favorites. Horrible cover art, weird layout, no lyrics, but blazing, raw Japanese thrash. And the SOCIETY OF FRIENDS LP—that band is so great, especially live. I think kids are scared of the cover art and the name. It's not your typical "crazy thrash" name or what not, but it's the most insane shit I have heard.

MRR: Where did the name for 625 Productions come from?

Hirax Max: I was involved in releasing a few records before the first 625 release, but when I

decided to actually start a label I had to come up with a name. 625 is a graffiti crew that Dan from SPAZZ and I belong to. I originally wanted to have the name be WxBxT, or West Bay Thrash, since I was focusing on the local scene, but I had a ton of friends convince me otherwise. So I had to come up with a name on the spot and I chose 625. Eonz did the logo that I used for the first 30 or so releases.

MRR: What is your association to skate culture? You seem to take a more underground approach with critiques on the mainstreaming of that scene. Do you skate?

Hirax Max: Yeah, in fact the two—skating and HC—have been intertwined my whole life. I used to roll around on a banana board with the neighborhood kids. We were emulating the older kids in our area who were into the late 70s and early 80s skate scene. And my first real skateboard was in 4th grade—well, I don't know about "real" since it was a Sure Grip Blaster; I bought it since it was the biggest fucking deck in the whole store. And as I got more into that, I was exposed to more things related to punk. That Bones Brigade video show with the FACTION song in it, my sister's friends skating, etc. The older kids at my school who skated always had bands written on the back of their jackets, so I would remember the names and go to the store to check it out. Sometimes it would be good, sometimes bad. I still skate now. Me and the SCHOLASTIC dudes have been trying to hit a park once a week, but our schedules are so crazy. So we will try to go hit Alameda skate park for an early morning session, or the

Van's indoor park when it's raining. I have a group of friends that I skate street with around SF that aren't affiliated with HC. But we get

along since we are all in the same boat: we're nearing 30, we still skate, we're not accepted by most other people. And, like my one friend Zac, he owns his own skate shop called Metro Board Shop. So me and him talk about the trials and tribulations of running a small, underground business.

MRR: You have taken on some pretty monumental tasks with your label. One of them is your ability to compile and release discographies of classic thrash bands like the SKEEZIKS from Germany or PROTES BENGTT from Sweden or HHH from Spain. But the first one you released was a recent band: CHARLES BRONSON. Did the CHARLES BRONSON release motivate you to start doing discographies of bands that didn't get their due or was it something else that drives you to engage in this form of hardcore archiving?

Hirax Max: Actually the first collection I did was 625 #2, an EP by this old local band called MORBID LIFE SOCIETY. They would open shows at both the thrash metal shows and the punk shows. They were right in between. A little speed metal, a little fast hardcore. After I did the first release I thought, "Wouldn't it be awesome to release the old MLS demo?" The ideas are born out of my own tastes when I was younger. What I was listening to 13 years ago, and me thinking "Whatever happened to that band?"

Discographies are cool because you get a band's entire retrospective on one format. Instead of hunting on eBay for four EPs and two LPs and various comps, you get a release that usually has everything (sometimes not). I try to do the discographies with info and art and just as much stuff as you can get to really capture the life of a band. I wish I could do vinyl version of all the discographies, but you have to resort to CD format due to the length of the material with most of them.

CHARLES BRONSON was born out of us talking about doing an LP. We'd always talked about it since they started, and when it finally came down to it, they did one on Lengua Armada since they lived so much closer to

Martin and Martin's constant support of the band. So I told 'em, "Listen man, we gotta do something, and if you're bust, what will it be?" So that was at the same time Mark was starting Youth Attack Records, and we all went in on the release. Mark facilitated the whole thing, so I didn't even really have too much input. In fact, when it came time to repress—I sold out of it in like, two seconds—I had to wait for a long time till the others were ready and had money.

MRR: How did the PROTES BENGTT discography come about?

Hirax Max: The PROTES BENGTT was the first really archival thing I took on. People in the mid-to-late 90s talked like everything that was happening at that time was new and the most extreme. I would always talk about the bands that got me into fast music in the first place, like PROTES BENGTT, SIEGE, RUIDO DE RABIA, HHH, OLHO SECO, SOB, NEOS, YOUTH KORPS, etc. Just all these bands that went as fast as they could be. And at the time, the shit was obscure, and only a few people knew and cared about those bands. So I thought, shit, it would be awesome to try to contact some of those bands and see if they would be into reissuing their stuff. I sent a letter to an old PROTES BENGTT address and it got returned. I was so bummed that I talked about it at a SPAZZ practice and Chris told me he just got a letter from Per, so I got the address and we went from there. I'm way into that coming out again, especially with the second demo tracks on there, although I wish there was more to look at, the insert is minimalist. But that's what Per sent, and not too much happened with that band; they were really only a side project. I'm toying with the idea of rereleasing that again either more on vinyl or maybe on CD.

MRR: How did the HHH discography come about?

Hirax Max: The HHH discography happened the same way. I wrote the band, never heard from them. I talked to a few kids in Barcelona and they said they were really hard to get a hold of. I brought the idea up with my friend Yann from Boislevé and he said he had been writing to Joan. So we got to talking and it came together. I'm way fucking proud of that one, man, although it was really Luc from *Ratbone* Zine and FACE UP TO IT that did all the layout stuff in France. He did an amazing job. I'm trying to keep that double CD in print so people will have the chance to get it far in the future—to keep the memory of HHH going. When they were around, I don't think too many people knew about them outside of Spain. I used to go record shopping with friends and find their LPs and tell them "You fucking *have* to get this," and my friend would be looking at the cover like, "Who the fuck is this?"

MRR: What's with the RAPED TEENAGERS discography, how did that happen?



Hirax Max: As for RAPED TEENAGERS, that band never got the credit they deserved at all. I would talk to my friends in high school about RT and they would kinda shrug it off like it was just too eclectic for them. Their first EP and MLPs are so amazing. Even the later stuff is done so well. So I talked to Henrik from OUT- LAST/DEAD END and I told him how much I loved RT and he said, "They are from my home town." So we got in contact with them, and Henrik was able to get some old demo and unreleased material. It's being dropped to DAT tape right now, so I should have some stuff to master in a few months. Kids will drop a load when they hear the old RAPED TEENAGERS stuff.

MRR: Do you have any other discographies in the works? What would you like to see released on terms of some hardcore classics that have not gotten the attention they deserve?

Hirax Max: Other discographies in the works are FLASH GORDON (they are still going) and a SPIT-FIRE collection. SPITFIRE are this amazing HC band from Sapporo that existed from '87 to '89. The whole Sapporo scene in the mid-80s got glanced over since they weren't playing metallic crossover like the famous Tokyo bands and whatnot. The kids up there were more influenced by the older US hardcore bands like MINOR THREAT and SOA. So I'm at Mitch's house from FACE OF CHANGE and he throws on this video from SPITFIRE and I couldn't believe it. It was like a LIFE'S HALT show nowadays but from '88 in Sapporo. I'm going to put their demo and a live show on a CD along with the same video footage that I saw. It really is amazing. I'm trying to get some of the older Sapporo bands out so people can hear a bit of Japanese HC history that was overlooked at the time and long since forgotten about.

MRR: You also have a history for putting out some of the most righteous comps from the Bandanna Thrash flexi to the Barbaric Thrash series. These comps are on par with Cleanse the Bacteria. But comps are so labor intensive. You have some new ones out as well, including the Murderous Grind Attack and the Four Corners comp. I get the sense that you are exposed to so much hardcore you wish you could put out and comps enable you to come close to reaching that mandate? Why do you do comps? Do you have any comps in the works?

Hirax Max: Oh shit man, you're blowing smoke up my butt. I think others would agree with me that the comps I do are not comparable to *Cleanse* or others, but thanks for making that comparison. It's flattering, dude. The way I think about comps, or I should say, the comps that I would like to emulate, are more of the sampler comps, the ones that expose bands either for the first time, or bring together bands from all over onto one format. Some of my favorite comps, put out by one of my favorite labels, MCR, are the *Unknown HC Drunkards Flexi* series or the *Best Run Fast Series*. They focused on new bands, gave them space for two or three songs to strut their stuff. Some of those bands didn't even do anything after that, while others went onto be the ones we regard as classics. Another label that did awesome comps is Adventure Family Records out of Yokohama. They covered bands from scenes that were outside of the major cities in Japan. Other examples of my favorites would be the old BCT tape comps, or the old Ataque Frontal LP comps from Brazil.

It's really easy for a label to go "OK, I'm going to ask all my favorite bands for one song and I'll have this killer comp," but what's the point? It's too easy to go after all the hyped-bands and try to make some monumental comp.

And yes, your question does get to another point. I buy, trade, and get a million demos, so I'm exposed to all these killer bands. So I think man, wouldn't it be awesome for these people to get a little exposure. That's the concept behind the newer versions of the *Barbaric Thrash* series; taking bands from all over the world that just released a demo and compiling them on one format. The next is Volume III and will have 34 bands from all over the world on 2 CDs with a bonus EP that has a great, old ASOCIAL demo on it where they are playing 1000mph HC. It's going to be

an insane double CD with an EP in a 7" booklet. I'm working on Volume IV right now, as well and am planning a few regionally focused versions of it later: Brazil, SE Asia, Northern California, etc. I feel more inspired by that approach to comps.

MRR: You have a fondness for demo formats. So much so that you've done demo-only zines like *Mosh of Ass*. I used to read your contributions to *Short, Fast & Loud* and the column that you used to do for *Maximum* religiously. What is the appeal behind demos? For me, it is the rawness of a recording, the energy that hasn't been killed by studio production. I also like the accessibility of the format for smaller runs and the exclusivity for those in the know. What is the appeal with demos?

Hirax Max: I love doing MOA. I get to sit down for a few hours each day and listen to a few tapes and review them. You know, sitting there with a Walkman on, folding out the cover and trying to get a sense of this new band. Like I said before, some of the best stuff a band does is on their demo.

Some of the time, I like the recording quality better on demos, sometimes you can get a really good raw recording out of a 4-track. So yeah, I agree, studios sometimes kill a band. About the accessibility factor, I think demos are an easy format you can reproduce at will, and when given consent, people in other places can record the demo for their friends, or through their tape distro. There are a few people in Western Europe and the US who are still doing tape labels, or started tape labels...like *RISK* here in SF. But in Eastern Europe and SE Asia, tape labels are THE way music gets around. I work with a few labels in Malaysia in order for them to reproduce a CD that 625 puts out for their tape labels; the music gets around that way. So I see it in another light than exclusivity. I think it increases availability in places where most people don't have record players or CD players. But yes, Western punks are more inclined to buy a "legitimate" release on vinyl or CD format before they send \$3 in the mail to get a tape.

Another reason that I tend to like demos is that anyone can go out and do it. All you need is some cash to buy some blank tapes, a tape recorder, and a copy place near your house and you have a demo. Sell 'em for \$2, give 'em away for free, doesn't matter. It's easy, cheap, and completely DIY. Once we start talking about vinyl and CDs, we're talking about having to start with \$500 or \$1000 to make 'em. I'm down for CDR demos in theory, since it's the same thing basically (you producing and manufacturing your own music cheaply). But then again, CDs have that digital sound that I don't really like. And finally, I like demos out of nostalgia. When I was younger, bands would open shows for years without any records coming out. They would be the biggest band in an area, drawing 200 people, and they still only had demos, so you would just get all these demos from your local bands. And once I started learning how to write bands, and mail-order, based on info. out of *MRR*—Walter Glaser reviews were like my bible, he would say, "This band is faster than D.R.I." and my \$3 was in an envelope in 5 minutes—I got all these demos straight from the bands that were



BREAKFAST "VERTIGO"

REAGAN SS

Hail the New Dawn.



Possessed to Skate



Volume Two

great, which are now all being released on CDs or in discographies.

MRR: Will you get back to writing any time soon?

Hirax Max: Honestly, I don't feel comfortable writing or being in print—which is kind of a contradiction since I'm doing this interview, yeah. I felt weird every month sitting down in front of a computer and going "OK, this is how I see it." I really enjoy one-on-one conversation, I can talk about hardcore forever, or politics, or whatnot, but I like to hear what others have to say. I want to listen more than talk. But as far as writing some diatribe and then having it published for 10,000 people to read and interpret their own way, I wasn't into it at all. I wasn't a good writer. I change my mind all the time. I learn from people all the time, so I just felt like it wasn't for me. I don't want to be known as an individual, since I feel uncomfortable being in the spotlight; and that's what the column felt like to me. I applaud others who can do it though, and I enjoy reading some stuff related to music every now and then. Although I would rather spend my time reading history books than books about punk rock music.

MRR: There seems to be a groundbreaking nature to 625 releases. I think of them as forerunners for various regional scenes that make up hardcore. What scenes do you try and reflect in hardcore? Do your releases reflect grind, power violence, thrash, crossover, fast core....

Hirax Max: I don't think of 625 as groundbreaking at all. I only put out those things that appeal to my own tastes, which are really generic. What I mean is, I like energetic and fast punk rock, which can be categorized as everything from some forms of New York HC to grind to garage punk. That's why I thought I was horrible at reviewing stuff for MRR. I liked it all, and even some bad stuff had a little ounce of credit since they seemed to be at least putting their hearts into it.

As for the label, I'm not looking for that band that is completely advancing a style, or writing music that is one hundred percent groundbreaking. If the people in the band seem nice, and our politics don't clash, and they seem to play music that I like pretty well, then I would consider helping 'em out if need be. Of course, there are other factors, but basically I would consider a band, if they were nice people, if they sounded like anything from FEAR OF GOD to GORILLA BISCUITS, you know? I mean, that's a pretty wide margin. I'm not trying to pin-down a "market", I'm trying to put out music that I like, made by people who I relate to. So that's everything from mosh to thrash to power violence to grind to punk to whatever other term there is.

MRR: In your opinion, what is the next thing to happen with hardcore? Felix Von Havoc approached this issue in a column of his, in which he thinks straight edge and d-beat will be converging. Where do you see musical influences within hardcore heading?

Hirax Max: Who knows? I mean, we can all have projections of what might happen around the corner, but I'm not really concerned with that. I mean, four or five years ago people went gaga for math metal, stuff like DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN or even DISCORDANCE AXIS. The reviews said that it was never done before, it pushed things to the extreme, blah, blah, blah. For me, I never related to it cuz I thought it didn't have the catchiness or soul that the punk stuff I liked contained. So while everyone was throwing gas on that fire, I just wanted to hear more of the sound that I already knew I liked. If something comes along, some new style, or new vocal style, like how grindcore changed vocal styles in punk, that I can relate to, then I'll be a fan, but I'm not too concerned with what is gonna happen next.

MRR: What are some of your observations with the various scenes that you have visited? Let's start off with North America. You have toured the states a bunch of times, where are the unique scenes and what contributions are they making on the current scene? What about some of the places abroad. You have been to Japan and your label spends some time documenting the current scene there. What are some of things about Japan's scene that are influencing hardcore? What about Brazil, what are some of your observations about Brazil in terms of lasting or significant input. How do Australia or Sweden factor into this?

Hirax Max: At first I was going to approach this as a "what is the differences between scene cultures" question. But thinking of it in terms of "contributions"—this might be a tough one.

You know, punk is pretty much the same no matter where you go. There is a certain ethic that goes along with it: rebelliousness, DIY, and a rejection of the music industry, but the differences lie in how it gets culturally expressed. So the contributions are just different expressions of that same energy, that same rebelliousness.

And all the places I have been, and all the places where people I trade with are from, seem to generate multiple forms of punk rock. I mean, every scene has a thrash band, a grind band, a sXe band, a mosh metal band. Before I would travel to some place, in my ignorance I would think, "I wonder what this place will be like?" I'd think that it was going to be one hundred percent foreign and unusual to tour there, and every time, although there were differences, there were a lot of similarities, as well.

So, to answer your question, I think every place contributes a great deal to the collective history and effort of punk rock in multiple forms, its just that those scenes with the most wealth—US, Japan, Western Europe—tend to manufacture and distribute more of it, and tend to set the trends within it. Hopefully that will change a little. Also, although there is a really strong activist strain in the US and European scenes, I think that punks are more politicized in second- or third-world countries—I hate using those terms. In some places, just

to be punk is to risk your security, and in other places, like Brazil, even the bands that are playing generic forms of youth crew straight edge have super political ideals and things to say from the stage. These punks are politicized because their lives are politicized. I just wish these areas had as much focus on them as the tired old scenes that we constantly focus on.

MRR: There seems to be a real cooperative spirit behind your label. 625 is involved in a lot of split and joint releases. You seem to get behind releases financially or with your distribution network, with your enthusiasm, with your name and reputation. How come you do so many co-releases? I see so many folks soured on cooperative ventures—it is refreshing to see somebody making it work. What is the secret?

Hirax Max: The secret? Working with the right people is one. Generally, there are multiple reasons why I have been involved in coreleases. Sometimes a band asks a million labels for help, and those labels all put their heads together to see what they can do. Sometimes a label is going to release something and it's going to be only on CD, so I offer to do vinyl if I think it's a release that needs to be on vinyl. Or I'll release it if it's going to be released by a foreign label and I know not too many copies will make it to the States or Europe. Then there's also the fact that I like to work with other labels in the same way that I like to work with bands. You get to know someone better through doing a project with them, and you have more input and whatnot. If it works right, it's a better experience.

I have been involved in a few projects where I had no control over what was going on, I just added money in or something. And I got really frustrated with how I couldn't get represses, or how it came out. But that has only happened a few times.

On the other hand, I'm working on a compilation called *FOUR CORNERS* right now, and it has been in the works forever! Seriously, like two years, and three other labels are going in on it. Well, some shit didn't come through, mainly due to artwork problems. And, so, two years later, there are these labels who are waiting patiently to get this ball rolling, and I feel responsible since I was the facilitator of it. One of the labels had to drop out. Now the bands' artwork issues got resolved, and it is finally going, after almost two years. But it didn't turn out to be the experience I was hoping for when I first started the project.

MRR: What is in the works for 625 Productions? What can we expect to see you release in the next little while?

Hirax Max: Releases by:

- THE FUTURES (Japan) LP (vinyl version of CD on MCR)
- I QUIT! (Sweden) 2nd EP
- THEY LIVE (New York) brand new LP and CD (bonus tracks on CD)
- SPITFIRE (Japan) collection CD
- EU's ARSE (Italy) collection LP
- CIRCLE (Japan) Debut EP
- KURBITS IR (Sweden) LP
- RAPED TEENAGERS (Sweden) collection
- FREAKS (Japan) EP
- SECRET 7 (Singapore) EP
- COMPLAIN (Japan) EP
- I SHOT CYRUS (Brazil) EP and LP
- NEVER CONFORM (Japan) EP
- REAGAN SS (US) debut EP
- RAZORS EDGE (Japan) Vinyl version of older releases
- HIGHSCORE (Germany) second LP
- REPROACH (Belgium) / MAD RATS (Portugal) split LP
- JELLYROLL ROCKHEADS (Japan) collection LP
- QUATTRO STAGIONE (Germany) 10" or LP
- DISCARGA (Brazil) / MAD RATS (Portugal) split EP
- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT (US) surprise EP
- FLASH GORDON collection release
- DYSTROPHY (US) EP

Plus the following compilations:

- Four Corners LP with: LIFE'S HALT (US), DEAD END (Sweden), HIGHSCORE (Germany), POINT OF FEW (Holland) and RAZLOG ZA (Croatia);
- Barbaric Thrash Vol. III 2xCD and EP - 32 new bands from all over the world, plus a crazy ASOCIAL demo from '84;
- Barbaric Thrash, Vol. IV (format?) - Working on it right now;
- Bay Area New Band comp EP with - VOETSEK, DYSTROPHY, DELTA FORCE, SCHOLASTIC DETH, ELEPHANT MAN, LAB RATS and SHARP KNIFE;
- SoCal New Band comp EP WITH APATHETIC YOUTH, HIT ME BACK, NERD ALERT, OUT OF VOGUE plus a few more;
- SE Asian New Band comp EP with: FOR THE KIDS, SECRET 7, EDORA, FASTGAME and DOMESTIK DOKTRINE; and
- Brazil New Band comp EP: in the works

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